

Because of the monopolistic handle the insurance company has on everything that happens—all the profits being made by the insurance industry, the pharmaceutical industry—the cost of health care is leaving 50 million American people uninsured, with many people losing their insurance. Today, 14,000 people will wake up in America with health insurance and go to bed without it. In the State of Nevada—sparsely populated, relatively speaking—220 people will wake up this morning with health insurance and go to bed tonight losing it, 7 days a week.

I admire and appreciate the freshmen Senators speaking out on the need to do something about health care.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for 90 minutes, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the majority controlling the first 45 minutes and the Republicans controlling the second 45 minutes.

The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time for morning business not begin until a quarter to 10.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon I came to the floor to speak out against one of the tactics that supporters of the President's health care proposal have resorted to in recent days.

It appears that a particular Senator has encouraged the administration to use its powers to clamp down on an opponent of the administration's health care policy—to clamp down—to use the

administration to clamp down on an opponent of the President's health care policy. What is more, the administration snapped to attention at the Senator's request. It followed the Senator's advice and almost immediately the government clamped down on a private health care company in my home State that had been sharing its concerns about the administration's health care proposal with seniors on Medicare.

Yesterday, we saw how legitimate those concerns were when the Director of the nonpartisan, independent Congressional Budget Office said the administration's proposed Medicare cuts would indeed lead to significant cuts in benefits to seniors.

Let me say that again. We had the Director of the Congressional Budget Office just yesterday confirm that what was said by this health insurance company to its customers was true. Yesterday, we saw how legitimate those concerns were when the Director of the nonpartisan, independent Congressional Budget Office said that the administration's proposed Medicare cuts would indeed lead to significant cuts in benefits to seniors. So a part of the administration is putting a gag order on a company for telling the truth to its customers.

First and foremost, this episode should be of serious concern to millions of seniors on Medicare who deserve to know what the government has in mind for their health care. But it should also frighten anyone—anyone—who cherishes their first amendment right to free speech, whether in Louisville, Helena, MT, San Francisco, or anywhere else. It should concern anyone who is already worried about a government takeover of health care. Why? Because it seems that in order to advance its goals, the administration and its allies are now attacking citizens groups and stifling free speech.

Let's review. At the instigation of the chairman of the Finance Committee, the author of the health care legislation now working its way through Congress, the executive branch, through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, has launched an investigation—believe it or not, an investigation—into Humana for explaining to seniors how this legislation would affect their coverage.

One more time: A private health care provider told its elderly citizens how its health care legislation might affect their lives. Now the Federal Government is putting its full weight into investigating that company at the request of the Senator who wrote the legislation in question. Now we find out the concerns the company was raising to its clients were perfectly legitimate, according to the Director of CBO. So, for telling the truth to your clients, you get investigated by the government. This is so clearly an outrage it is hard to believe anyone thought it would go unnoticed. For explaining to seniors how legislation might affect

them, the Federal Government has now issued a gag order on that company and any other company that communicates with clients on the issue, telling them to shut up—shut up or else. This is precisely the kind of thing Americans are worried about with this administration's health care plan.

They are worried that handing government the reins over their health care will lead to this kind of intimidation. They are worried that government agencies, which were created to enforce violations evenhandedly, will, instead, be used against those who voice a different point of view.

That is apparently what is happening here, and to many Americans it is a preview of what is in store for everyone under the administration's health care plan. It is hard to imagine any justification for this. But if people behind this latest effort believe they have some legal justification for shutting up a private company, then they need to explain themselves to the American people. More specifically, they need to explain to 11 million seniors on Medicare Advantage why they should not be allowed to know how the cuts to this program will affect their coverage.

Yesterday, my office called CMS to ask for the legal authority that would warrant them imposing an industry-wide gag order on an issue of public concern. We are still waiting for a response. So this morning I am asking the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to provide my office with its justification for telling a company it cannot communicate with its seniors.

Over the past several months, we have seen a pattern of intimidation by supporters of the administration's health care proposals, including efforts to demonize serious-minded critics at townhall meetings across the country. Now we are seeing something even worse, the full power of the Federal Government being brought to bear on businesses by the very people writing the legislation. This was troubling enough in itself. It is even more troubling now that we are told that Humana was exactly right—exactly right in what it was telling its clients. Americans are already skeptical about the administration's plan. They should be even more skeptical now.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Virginia is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise with a group of my freshmen colleagues to discuss an issue that is on all our minds and on the minds of many Americans and that is the issue of health care reform. The subject most of us are going to address today is what happens if we do nothing on this critically important issue because we, as recent additions to this body, are united by a simple but important truth: the rising cost of health care is

hobbling American business, stressing family budgets and, if we do nothing and it is left unchecked, it will explode our national debt.

While many of my colleagues have raised important and valid questions about some of the health care proposals, one of the things I hope all my colleagues will realize is that doing nothing to reform our health care system is a policy choice. It would be a misguided choice, an irresponsible choice, but it is a choice nonetheless.

Today, health care costs in America consume nearly 17 percent of our GDP. This is projected to grow to one-third of our GDP by 2040 if we do nothing. This chart shows this ever-escalating cost of health care and its percentage of our GDP. Here we see the cost in actual dollar amounts, \$2.4 to \$2.5 trillion spent on health care in the past year.

Our per capita health care cost is double that of virtually every other developed nation in the world—nations we compete against every day. As we come out of this recession and American business has to compete against these countries around the world, our economy is hobbled by costs that, on average, include \$3,000 more per employee due to our higher health care costs than our competing nations.

If we look at an issue that is equally important and one that I know our colleagues, especially my freshmen colleagues, continue to raise—but we hear concerns about from our friends on the other side of the aisle—that is the concern about our Federal deficit. The primary cause of our Federal deficit and our overall debt is the increasing per-person costs of Medicare and Medicaid. We pay more and more dollars in the Federal budget each year to basically pay for the same level of care. As this chart shows, increasing Medicare and Medicaid costs alone will exceed all other Federal spending. Clearly, this situation is not sustainable.

In my home State of Virginia, since 2000, insurance premiums have increased nearly 90 percent, while wages have only increased 27 percent. If we do nothing, and this was reaffirmed by the Business Roundtable report just last week, nationwide insurance premiums are projected to double by 2016. This is of particular concern to small businesses. Today, small businesses are the only group that still pay retail for their health care services. Their size makes their bargaining power weak and makes them susceptible to enormous increases in health care premiums.

Once again, it is a policy choice. Doing nothing means exploding our Federal debt and deficit. Doing nothing means doubling health care premium costs for American families. Doing nothing means American companies will be less competitive in a global market and our small businesses will continue to pay retail for health care.

Mr. President, I think I speak for all my freshmen colleagues when I say we were not elected to do nothing. We did

not run for office because we were satisfied with the direction of our Nation. We were elected to work together with willing Republicans and Democrats to help turn this country around. I hope this will be the first of a series of statements from the freshman class, who are not only here to point out the challenges we face but to join Senators from both sides of the aisle who are committed to getting things done.

I would now like to yield 5 minutes to my colleague, the distinguished Senator from New Hampshire.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I wish to begin by recognizing and thanking Senator WARNER for his efforts today to organize the freshmen to talk about why it is so critical that we get something done to reform health care in this country. He and I both belong to the former Governors caucus, and I come to this debate with the work, years of work that I did as Governor and the perspective we have to do something to improve the availability of health care for all Americans and certainly for the families in New Hampshire.

Over the past several months, my office has responded to thousands of letters and phone calls about health care. I have traveled all across New Hampshire, talking to small business owners and families who are desperate for help. I have talked to health care providers who are frustrated with the current system. Time and time again, what I have heard is that our health care system is not working. Costs are too high and access is too limited. The status quo is simply not sustainable. Now is the time to act.

Every day in New Hampshire and across our country, families are struggling with the rising costs of health care. It threatens their financial stability and leaves them exposed to higher premiums and deductibles and puts them at risk of losing their health insurance and, in too many cases, financial ruin. According to one study, 62 percent of bankruptcies in 2007 were caused by a medical condition. I have a chart that shows this very clearly. This is the 62 percent of those bankruptcies that were the result of the costs of medical care. What is probably even more concerning is that of those 62 percent, 78 percent of them were insured. So most of the people in this country who are going bankrupt as the result of their health care costs actually have health insurance.

Health care costs are a threat to our economy, to our small businesses, and to our working families. The current health care system is simply unsustainable for our economy. As Senator WARNER pointed out, it is estimated that in 2009 our Nation will spend \$2.5 trillion or 18 percent of our gross domestic product on health care. That means health care costs account for 18 percent of the value of all the

goods and services produced in this country. If we continue on this current path, health care will make up over a third of our economy by 2040.

Senator WARNER showed that in a chart. This is a graph that shows the same thing—what happens to health care costs if we do nothing, as a portion of the entire economy of this country.

In New Hampshire, our small businesses are feeling this burden firsthand. From 2002 to 2006, there was a more than 40-percent increase in the cost of health insurance premiums for New Hampshire businesses. For those of our smallest businesses, those with fewer than 10 employees, that increase was almost double, to more than 70 percent—a 70-percent increase in just 4 years for small businesses in New Hampshire. That means that, although our small business owners want to provide their employees with health insurance, many of them cannot afford it.

Ultimately, it is our hard-working families who suffer. Today, the average family living in New Hampshire pays about \$14,600 for their insurance premium. In New Hampshire, we have the highest premiums in the country for those people who have group rates.

I wish to say that one more time because in New Hampshire we are paying the highest premiums in the country for group health insurance. If we continue on this current path, families will be paying almost \$25,000 in the next 10 years, by 2019. Again, here is another graph that shows what is going to happen to New Hampshire families—\$25,000 in 10 years. This is not affordable.

The good news is that we know how to bring down costs. At the Center for Informed Choice at Dartmouth, research shows that more spending does not translate into better outcomes. In fact, it shows that up to 40 percent of the time, patients who are engaged in the decisions related to their care will choose the less invasive and less costly procedures. These choices produce better outcomes with higher rates of patient satisfaction.

The health care industry can do better for less. We can find savings in our system. For example, experts have estimated that we can save \$5,000 per Medicare beneficiary by reducing costly hospital readmissions. I have introduced legislation with Senator SUSAN COLLINS from Maine called the Medicare Transitional Care Act. This bipartisan legislation will reduce Medicare costs and offer better support and coordination of care to Medicare patients. This will not only improve the quality of health care for our seniors, but it will also save taxpayers money.

I was very pleased to see that many of these provisions were in the markup that came out of the Finance Committee.

Although the numbers and statistics are compelling, it is really the stories I have heard from my constituents

which best illustrate why reform cannot wait. This is not just about politics, this is about real people.

A few weeks ago I received a letter from a young woman named Jennifer. Jennifer and her husband had recently decided they wanted to start a family. They both work for small businesses that do not offer health insurance, so they shopped around for an individual insurance plan. The policy they could afford did not cover standard maternity care, but they were told they would be covered in case of an emergency: if Jennifer needed a C-section or if she had other health problems during the pregnancy.

Unfortunately, Jennifer suffered a rare complication, a molar pregnancy, resulting in a loss of the pregnancy and requiring extensive followup. But the insurance company told them it would not cover "that" emergency. So during their time of grieving, Jennifer and her husband are not only facing piles of medical bills, they are wondering how they will ever be able to afford a baby in the future.

No young family should have to go through this. We have the opportunity to stabilize health care costs and reform our health care system for people such as Jennifer and her husband. We know this is not easy. It is one of the greatest challenges of our time. But the time has long passed for action. We need to act now to stabilize costs and provide coverage for Americans.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to achieve this goal.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. I thank my colleague, the Senator from New Hampshire, on her very excellent comments. We are running a little behind. I do want to come back, if we have time, to talk about the costs to State budgets, something both she and I experienced.

I yield 5 minutes of our time to the distinguished Senator from Delaware.

Mr. KAUFMAN. I thank the Senator.

I join my freshmen colleagues this morning to discuss the Nation's health care system and urge Congress to pass reform legislation this year. I think there are two major reasons we need to enact health reform this year, and they both require controlling health care costs.

First, we need to pass health care reform because failure to do so could literally bankrupt the country. Just look at Medicare and Medicaid. One of the biggest driving forces behind our Federal deficit is the skyrocketing cost of Medicare as well as Medicaid. In 1966 Medicare and Medicaid accounted for only 1 percent; that is, 1 percent of all government expenditures. Today they account for 20 percent. If we do nothing to start bending the cost curve down for Medicare and Medicaid, we will eventually spend more on these two programs than all other Federal programs combined.

Medicare spending is growing rapidly for the same reasons that private

health care spending is growing rapidly: increases in the cost and utilization of medical care. Between 1970 and 2007, Medicare's spending for each enrollee rose by an average of 8.5 percent annually, while private health insurance increased by 9.7 percent per person per year.

The Congressional Budget office estimates that Federal spending on Medicare and Medicaid was approximately 4 percent of the Nation's gross domestic product in 2008. If we fail to act—and we cannot fail to act—Federal spending on Medicare and Medicaid will rise to 7 percent of GDP by 2025. We must bend these cost curves down and slow the level of growth in Medicare and Medicaid programs if we are ever to get our budget situation under control.

The second major reason we have to act is because failure to do so will drive more and more Americans into personal bankruptcy. Today bankruptcy involving medical bills accounts for more than 60 percent of U.S. personal bankruptcies, a rate 1.5 times that of just 6 years ago.

Keep in mind, more than 75 percent of families entering bankruptcy because of health care costs actually have health insurance. I think we have a popular idea that the people going bankrupt are people who cannot manage their money, who do not have health insurance. These are people who have health insurance. Again, two-thirds of all Americans filing for bankruptcy because of medical bills already have insurance. These are middle-class Americans who are well educated and own their own homes. They just cannot keep up with the alarming rise in costs associated with medical care.

We have to act so that Americans no longer have to worry about how they are going to afford their medical bills. We need to pass health care reform and give Americans more stability in these rough economic times so they no longer have to choose between paying their medical bills or paying their home mortgages or their children's tuition payments. Controlling health care costs is a major reason we need to pass health care reform today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. I thank my colleague from Delaware for pointing out the enormous cost of inaction both to our Federal deficit and to families who are struggling with these costs.

Now I yield 4 minutes of our time to the distinguished Senator from Alaska.

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, I am pleased to stand with my freshman colleague this morning. We often share the back bench, but today we bring our message front and center. The time has come for action on health insurance reform. We represent the North and South. For me, everyone comes from the South. But today we see that no matter where you live in this country or what you do for a living the cost of inaction is simply unacceptable. All of us can cite alarming statistics from our States.

In my State, there are now 133,000 uninsured Alaskans. The raw numbers may not be much when compared to Virginia, Illinois, or Colorado, but in Alaska that number represents 20 percent of the population.

To me, and I hope to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, this is unacceptable. Average insurance premiums in Alaska have doubled in the past decade to more than \$12,000 annually. If we do not act, they will double again about the time my 7-year-old son starts high school. Families cannot afford that.

Already, the average Alaskan family pays a hidden tax of \$1,900 in premiums to cover the cost of uncompensated care provided to people without insurance, and it will only get worse as time moves forward. The problem is especially tough for small businesses in my State because Alaska has a high proportion of small business owners: fishermen, float plane operators, construction contractors, independent realtors, and the like.

Some 52 percent of all the jobs in Alaska are held by small business workers or the self-employed. They know better than anyone that a broken health care system leads to lost jobs, reduced productivity, less investment, and stalled business growth. Just this weekend I met with a small business townhall and there was one clear message from them to me, to Congress: Do something. Do it now. Each one cited their increases ranging from 14 to 41 percent in health care costs this year alone. That is why one of the best ways we in the Senate can strengthen and grow Alaska's and American business is to pass meaningful health care reform not sometime down the road but this year.

I joined the small business majority earlier this year as they released the compelling report on the need for reform. The bottom line, even with middle-of-the-road reform: American small business will spend \$800 billion more than they need to over the next 10 years.

If they can save that, with just the middle-of-the-road reform, we can save them money and put it to the best use. Considering that small business is driving economic recovery in America, that is huge. Eight hundred billion dollars saved is available for infrastructure, innovation, and providing stable jobs.

It is not just small business that needs reform. The Business Roundtable, which has been spoken about already this morning, which represents much bigger companies, released a report last week that said health care costs will triple over the next decade to nearly \$29,000 per employee.

There is plenty to debate about health care reform in the weeks ahead. I still have questions of my own. But there is one thing I hear from all across my State and across this country, from e-mails and messages we receive: support for health care reform is truly support for America's businesses.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Virginia is recognized.

Mr. WARNER. I thank my friend from Alaska for pointing out, particularly, with small businesses, that in our current system they are the only people who pay retail for their health care expenses. Reform must rectify that.

I yield 4 minutes to the Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, during 11 townhalls in Oregon this August I heard a lot of heartfelt anger and confusion from Oregonians about health care in our Nation. I am sure it echoed the confusion and frustration from voices across our Nation.

A lot of Oregonians came out to tell me that they did not like one bit the description of the reform plan they were hearing on radio and on television. If reform means they would have to give up their insurance or give up their doctor, they did not want any of it.

If reform meant that government panels would deny care to seniors, then they wanted me to know that was outrageous, that they would never support it. And I agree with them. If reform had those features, it sure would not get my vote. I do not think it would get a single vote in this Chamber.

But as most of America now knows, those claims were lies told to scare the bejebers out of citizens by folks who profit from our current health care system. It says a lot, does it not, that those who want to block repairs to our broken health care system have to resort to creating myths in order to whip up opposition.

The opponents of reform have their own plan, which is continue to profit from the current system, our current broken system. Their plan, simply put, is a terrible plan for America. The opponents' status quo plan features shutting out folks with potential health care risks, those who most need health care, from our health care system. Their plan features denying coverage for citizens with preexisting conditions. Their plan involves dumping citizens out of coverage who, after years of paying their premiums, develop a health care problem and then they lose their health care.

The opponents' status quo plan is to continue a broken system in which premiums double every 7 years, putting health care out of reach to America's working families and robbing workers of their pay raises that could improve their standard of living.

The opponents' plan is to continue health care rationing by insurance company bureaucrats who make money denying the claims. The opponents' plan is to continue lifetime limits that pile massive debt on those unfortunate enough to get sick or injured.

The opponent's plan is to continue a system in which health care costs drive more than half the bankruptcies in

America, tearing the financial foundations out of our working families, setting them back decades, if, in fact, they ever recover at all.

What I did hear from citizens back home is they do not like that status quo plan. They want to see those problems fixed. They want an individual to be able to join a pool and get a much better deal. They as a small business want to know that they will be able to control health care costs and keep providing health insurance, and maybe even get a better deal, and not have to pay the transfer costs of all of the folks who do not have health care and end up in the emergency room.

So for small businesses to thrive in our Nation, for American families to thrive, for large businesses to compete internationally, we must fix our broken health care system. The status quo plan put forward by opponents is simply wrong for America, wrong for families and wrong for business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. I thank my friend from Oregon for pointing out, in vivid terms, the challenges the status quo presents to so many American families. I yield 4 minutes to my friend, the distinguished Senator from Colorado.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. President, I am here with my fellow freshmen Senators because we are united in our determination to pass health insurance reform this year. Our late and giant colleague Senator Ted Kennedy said it best when he called health reform "the great unfinished business of society."

We are presented this fall with a historic opportunity to finally succeed, and, for me, failure is not an option. The cost of inaction is too great, both for American families and for our economy. We have a bloated \$12 trillion Federal debt which is being fed every day by growing health care costs. Every day, small and large businesses are laying off workers and slashing benefits to their employees. Those Americans who have coverage still do not have the peace of mind that comes from knowing insurance companies will keep their promises. Premiums are rising at three times the rate of wages. The number of uninsured is growing at a faster rate every day. In my State of Colorado, nearly one in four is uninsured in some areas. The Treasury Department recently released a study showing that one out of every two Americans will lose coverage at some point over the next 10 years. We can't allow this to become America's future, but it will if we don't act now.

There are many reasons health care reform cannot wait, but there is one that I know strikes a chord with many Coloradans; that is, the lack of freedom our current system provides. Workers across our country are afraid to leave their jobs for fear they won't be able to provide health care to their families.

That lack of freedom affects our economy because fostering the growth

of small business is one of the keys to economic success. In our current system, Americans are afraid to follow their dreams and start a small business or travel to go to work for a new company. Small businesses run on thinner margins than their big-company counterparts, and they are being hit hardest by the rise in health care costs. In Colorado, we have a disproportionate share of small businesses. As a result, we have more citizens who are uninsured. Those who do offer benefits are finding themselves increasingly facing no-win decisions. They are faced with either hiring fewer employees or slashing benefits or dropping coverage completely or, in some cases, going out of business forever.

The proposals in front of us are tailor-made to help small businesses. The ideas in place would provide tax credits and create a simplified, well-regulated, pooled marketplace to help small businesses find cheaper and higher quality coverage. It is estimated that reform will save small businesses more than \$500 billion over 10 years or more than \$3,500 per worker. That is real money that can be reinvested in business growth and adding additional jobs to fuel our economic recovery.

The burden on individuals is only one of the culprits preventing economic growth. Our deepening Federal deficit and long-term fiscal outlook are also closely linked to a broken system. As President Obama said in his address to Congress 2 weeks ago: Our Nation's health care problem is our deficit problem. Just think, we spend \$2 trillion on health care per year. That is more than \$1 out of every \$5 spent in the economy, more than twice what any other industrialized nation spends. I think we would all agree we are not twice as healthy for our money. If this number continues to grow, there is no hope for reining in long-term deficits.

Health insurance reform is a golden opportunity to begin to control our deficit. We can and we need to grab this opportunity and make health care the springboard from which we clean up our long-term fiscal mess. The President reminded us that the growth of health care costs, if slowed by one-tenth of 1 percent a year, would help bring down the deficit by \$4 trillion.

There are many excellent ideas on the table to help us get there—by ensuring Medicare's solvency, reforming Medicare's payment structure to bring down cost growth in the long-term, and discouraging overgenerous health plans which encourage overutilization of the system.

As Senator WARNER and others have pointed out, many of the proposals being discussed are politically difficult to support. But not facing politically difficult decisions head-on is what has caused so much of the inertia that has brought us to where we are today. We don't all agree on exactly the best way forward, but we do agree it is time for every Member of Congress and every Member of the Senate to think about

health insurance reform for what it is: a huge and necessary step to putting our economy back on track and finally providing stability, security, and freedom to the people. If we do this, I know we can find common ground. We must because the cost of inaction is too great.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET). The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Colorado.

We are hearing a common theme. These freshman Members all care about driving down cost, and they see health care reform as stimulative to the American economy and recognize that ensuring the growth of our economy means we have to get the deficit under control. That means driving health care costs down.

I yield 4 minutes to my colleague from New Mexico.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, I am proud to join our class today to talk about the cost of inaction.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. President, health insurance reform is one of the defining challenges of our time. Every person in our country has a stake in what we do at this moment, in this place. And while there are a lot of proposals out there, there is one thing we know for sure: Maintaining the status quo is not an option.

It is what has been done for years. It has been the easy choice. Kick the can down the road a couple yards . . . a couple of years . . . but never get at the root of the problem. Maintaining the status quo is the one coward's way out. And one doesn't need an economics degree to see where that approach has gotten us.

Part of meeting the challenge of reforming health insurance is being honest about the consequences we face if we don't. So I rise today to talk about the high price of doing nothing.

It is a price we will all pay—a human price, an economic price, a societal price. All equally devastating if we don't muster the courage, if we don't have the political will to stand up and say: Not anymore. Not on our watch.

The human price is the price we feel most personally when we see our family, our friends, our neighbors struggling to obtain health care, to afford health care, or to hold on to the health care they already have.

If we do nothing—if we maintain the status quo—more Americans will be uninsured or underinsured. More Americans will become sick. More will die because of lack of care, and more families will experience financial ruin.

A new report that came out last week found that family premiums have already increased by about 5 percent this year. Over the past 10 years, premiums have gone up 131 percent. It is a vicious cycle. America's families, America's workers and businesses—especially small businesses—can't keep up.

In New Mexico, we have been paying the human price of the status quo for

years. In my State, nearly one in four residents lacks health insurance. That makes us the second-highest uninsured State in the Nation. And three-quarters of uninsured New Mexicans work or are from working families. Added to that, 80 more New Mexicans lose their health care coverage every day.

People like a woman I met in Raton, NM, last month. She and her husband just got a renewal notice from their health care insurer. Their premium rose 24 percent this year alone. It is an increase they can't afford, and they don't know what to do. They are paying the human price for the status quo.

Along with the human price, there is the economic price.

By now it is a familiar refrain. The health care system as we know it is unsustainable. It is unsustainable for taxpayers, who are picking up the costs for those who can't afford or can't obtain insurance on their own. It is unsustainable for businesses which aren't able to afford skyrocketing costs to cover their employees. And it is unsustainable for our government. As President Obama said recently:

Our health care problem is our deficit problem. Nothing else even comes close.

Without health care reform, if we do nothing but maintain the status quo, the problems that seem insurmountable today will look like child's play compared with the catastrophic news of tomorrow.

If we fail to act, the number of uninsured Americans will increase from more than 46 million last year to more than 53 million in 2019. And that is a best case scenario. The actual number could be as high as almost 58 million. For New Mexico, failure to act would mean that insured New Mexicans continue paying \$2,300 in hidden subsidies for the uninsured.

If we fail to act, U.S. spending on health care will climb from almost \$2.4 trillion last year to almost \$4.3 trillion in 2017. And insurance companies will continue to profit at the expense of America's health and America's pocketbooks.

If we fail to act, businesses will continue to flounder under the crushing costs of health care coverage. Fewer businesses will open their doors. More will call it quits for good. And, most chillingly, the entrepreneurial spirit that is so uniquely American could be badly damaged.

If we fail to act, government at all levels will suffer. Budgets will continue to shrink. Priorities like education, energy innovation and job creation will continue to be underfunded. Americans will continue to pay the economic price.

Finally, along with the human and economic costs, there is one more price to consider if we don't step up to our responsibilities and deliver on health care. That price is more figurative, but no less painful.

I am talking about the price we pay as a country for not living up to the ideals on which America was founded.

America is heralded as the land of opportunity. But realizing that opportunity should not be dependent on whether you have enough money in your bank account to afford health care.

America is a place where "all men are created equal." But how can that be true if access to something as fundamental as health care is divided between the haves and have nots?

Harry Truman—who was the first President to attempt to provide every American with health care—put it simply:

We are a rich nation and can afford many things. But ill-health which can be prevented or cured is one thing we cannot afford.

More than 60 years later, his words ring true:

We cannot afford ill-health which can be prevented or cured.

We cannot afford to maintain the status quo.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I know our time allotment is drawing to a close and we still have more Senators who wish to speak.

I yield 3 minutes to my distinguished colleague, the Senator from Illinois.

Mr. BURRIS. Mr. President, I am honored to be able to join my freshman colleagues as we speak on this important issue of health care reform. On September 9, the President stood before the Congress and issued a resounding call for health care reform. It is time for us to answer. We need to recognize, as our President does, that this is our moment to stand for freedom and opportunity.

Health care reform is nothing less than a moral imperative. For years, costs have been rising and the quality of care has been going down. For the giant corporations that provide health insurance, rising costs have meant rising profits. They rake in millions of dollars by denying coverage to sick Americans. But for those of us who are not health care insurance executives, rising costs have become a terrible burden.

In the early 1990s, when President Clinton and the Democratic Congress tried to pass health care reform, insurance companies brought costs under control. From 1993 to 1995, health care costs grew by an average of only \$38 billion. Insurance corporations must have been afraid that reform would hurt profits, so they self-regulated, keeping costs under control until the threat of reform had passed. But when the Republicans took back the Congress, health care reform was dropped and costs skyrocketed, however. Between 1995 and 2006, costs increased by almost \$102 billion annually. These numbers are clear. We are spiraling out of control, and inaction is not an option. We cannot stand by as millions of Americans all across the country are forced into bankruptcy by medical bills.

Some say we are moving too quickly, that we need to wait. I ask, wait for

what, for more people to get sick and die because they don't have access to health care? The American people have been waiting far too long. We must not wait any longer. It is time to make sure everyone has access to quality care and affordable health care. It is time to make sure no one can be dropped because of preexisting conditions and to provide a public option to compete with the private insurers. It is our duty to stand up for what we know is right.

Mr. President, 45 years ago another Illinois Senator saw this same need as Congress debated the Civil Rights Act. The bill was under fire. There were some who could not accept reform. But Senator Everett Dirksen knew equality was woven into the moral fabric of this Nation, and he knew America had waited long enough for change to happen. Standing on the floor of this Chamber, he echoed Victor Hugo, who said: Stronger than all the enemies is the idea whose time has come. The time has come. Let's vote in health care reform.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Illinois. I also thank my distinguished colleague from Tennessee for granting our group 4 additional minutes.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask unanimous consent that each side be granted 4 additional minutes in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WARNER. I now yield 4 minutes to the Senator from North Carolina, my friend.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mrs. HAGAN. Mr. President, I rise with my colleagues to discuss the urgent need for comprehensive health care reform and why I believe the cost of inaction is simply too high for North Carolina and America's working families.

As I traveled across the State during the August recess, it was clear that North Carolinians are concerned about the rising cost of health care. In the past 10 years in my State, the cost of health care premiums has increased 98 percent, whereas wages have increased only 18 percent. That is a startling statistic. Just last week, the chamber of commerce from Dunn, NC, came to visit me in Washington. One man has a company that employs 600 employees. The cost of health care last year for his company increased 28 percent—in 1 year. That is simply unsustainable for America's businesses.

The Treasury Department issued a stern warning just last week: If we do nothing to tackle the skyrocketing cost of health care, nearly half of all Americans under the age of 65 will lose their health insurance in 10 years. Those are frightening numbers.

Right now, the average family's health insurance premium is \$13,375. If

Congress does not send our President a reform bill, premiums are expected to rise to a staggering \$25,000 in 2016. Today, this average premium represents a little over a quarter of a family's income. But, by 2016, that average premium will represent almost half of a family's income. How are people going to be able to afford to pay for mortgages and save for college tuition if they are paying half their monthly income for insurance premiums?

This past year, North Carolina's unemployment rate rose to 11 percent. Many of the thousands of North Carolinians who have lost their jobs in this recession have also lost their health care, and many more families are facing this frightening reality: One medical emergency could send them into bankruptcy.

In 2005, nearly half of all Americans who filed for bankruptcy cited major medical expenses as the reason for their financial decline. Between 2001 and 2008, the number of uninsured in North Carolina increased from 1.1 million to 1.4 million people. Without action, this number is going to continue to grow.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee crafted a bill that ensures that people who like their insurance and their doctors keep them. It also expands access to health insurance for those without it, and slows down the skyrocketing cost of health care—the three critical components President Obama called for in his speech to Congress 2 weeks ago.

The President has been adamant that health care reform must not add one dime to our Federal deficit now or in the future, which has been a requirement of mine all along. The exploding cost of health care has put our Nation's economic security at risk. We simply cannot afford inaction any longer.

In 1960, health care spending was 4.7 percent of GDP. Today, it is 18 percent. On the current trajectory, by 2030, health care costs will account for 28 percent of GDP.

We need health care reform to get our deficit under control. We need a reform package that ensures a preexisting condition, such as diabetes or cancer, no longer prevents anyone from obtaining health insurance. We need health care reform to ensure America's families do not have to fear bankruptcy when a loved one gets sick.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from North Carolina and all these freshmen Senators who have talked today about the very real costs of inaction.

I would like to now call on our final colleague, my friend, the junior Senator from Colorado.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Colorado is recognized.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Virginia and the rest of my colleagues.

I have a few slides I wish to go through. But the basic point is, no matter what one thinks about the various health care bills that are out there and the various prescriptions that have been suggested, the status quo is not an option.

For me, this starts with fiscal responsibility. We have seen an unbelievable explosion in debt in our country, from \$5 trillion, from the beginning of the previous administration, to \$12 trillion today. If you look at what is causing it: As you can see from this slide, this is our revenue line. The biggest drivers of our deficit are the interest payments we have on this debt—that we are managing to pass on to our kids and our grandkids because we are unwilling to make the tough choices that need to be made—and rising Medicare and Medicaid costs, which is the red line right here. So one cost of inaction is we will continue to drive these insane deficits we are facing as a country.

In my State of Colorado—and the senior Senator from Colorado is in the Chamber as well—our working families and small businesses are suffering mightily because the economy is not working for them. Over the last decade, median family income in the State of Colorado has actually declined by \$800 in real dollars, and that has happened all across the United States of America, where we see median family income down by \$300.

At the same time, health care premiums have risen by 97 percent. The cost of higher education, by the way, has gone up 50 percent. Our working families are being asked to do more with less just for the basic necessities that are required to move your family ahead. These are not “nice to haves.” These are essential, if working families and the middle class are going to be able to move ahead.

The second reason we need reform is, as the Senator from Virginia said at the beginning of his comments, we are spending almost a fifth of our GDP on health care. That is more than twice as much as what any other industrialized country in the world is spending on their health care system.

As I have said in townhall meetings all across our State, this is no different than if you have two small businesses across the street from one another, with one spending a fifth of their revenue on their light bill and the other spending less than half that on their light bill. You do not need an MBA to know which of those two companies is going to be able to invest in their business plan and grow their business.

We have a lot to do to make sure this economy can compete in the 21st century. I would say one of the things we ought to do is not to devote a fifth of our economy to health care if we expect to compete.

This slide shows the rate of insurance premium increase in our State versus the rate of the increase in wages. These are absolutely related to each other. If

you talk to small businesses in any State—I am sure this is true in Virginia, as well as it is true in Colorado—small business owners are desperately trying to keep their employees insured, but the choice they are making is to pay them less in wages. This wage compression is related directly to the rate of the insurance premium.

The other chart of this slide simply shows if we change nothing there are going to be families all across this country who, by 2016, are going to be spending 40 percent of their income on health care—that is before you get to higher ed; that is before you get to rent or food—40 percent of every dollar on health care. It is absurd.

We see that health care is bankrupting middle-class Americans all over this country. We know 62 percent of bankruptcies are health care related. What is staggering to me is, 78 percent of those bankruptcies are happening to people who had insurance. The entire reason people buy insurance is so they have stability when their child gets sick or their spouse gets sick or they get sick. Seventy-eight percent of these bankruptcies have happened to people who had insurance.

Then, finally, no one is burdened more by the current system than small business and the employees who work for small businesses. In our State, small business pays 18 percent more for health insurance just because they are small. When I say that, sometimes people say: Well, Michael, don't you understand that is because the pool is smaller and it is harder to spread the risk. I say: I understand that. But from a business point of view—and the Senator from Virginia and I both have spent a lot of time in our careers working in the private sector—from a business point of view, that is absurd because these small businesses, if they are investing 18 percent more, ought to be expecting to be 18 percent more productive or, at a minimum, ought to have 18 percent better health care, and that is absolutely not the case.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 1 additional minute.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BENNET. My final point, Mr. President, is we have been having a healthy debate about how we should do this reform, and there are a lot of people who are concerned about things such as a public option, things such as government control over health care. I would argue that the status quo is what is producing that because fewer and fewer of our working families are covered at work—which is what this slide shows—and for every one of those people who then goes on uncompensated care, it is paid for by the American people.

So I join my colleagues today in saying, we absolutely cannot maintain this status quo. It is absolutely unsustainable. I look forward to a thoughtful, commonsense reform that

works for working families and small businesses in my State.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank our colleagues on the other side of the aisle for the additional time.

I appreciate the opportunity we have had to make our statements.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The time is expired.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, how much time is available for the Republican side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BENNET). Forty-nine minutes.

The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I commend my friends on the Democratic side for their interest in health care reform and their coming here to express their views. I can say to them very clearly there is 100 percent agreement on the Republican side that we do not want the status quo, and there is 100 percent agreement on the Republican side that there would be one thing worse than the status quo and that would be higher premium costs, more debt for the government, and higher taxes.

I am afraid that is what my friends are arguing for because they are continuing to say they want to insure at least 30 million more people, they want to improve the benefits for people already on insurance, and they want to reduce costs. That does not add up. So I think it is time we get down to some reality in this discussion about: How can we best achieve health care reform in this country?

We, on the Republican side, want health care reform, but we do not want more debt, more taxes, and higher premium costs for people who cannot afford their insurance policies now. Yet the proposals we have seen on that side of the aisle do that.

Our focus should be about one thing: Health care reform should be about one thing: reducing costs, reducing costs to individuals and small businesses who are paying for health care, and reducing the cost to our government, which is the responsibility of every single one of us taxpayers in this country.

We have had several proposals from the Democratic side that increase the debt and increase the cost, and the President himself, in effect, rejected them in his address to Congress the other day because he said there cannot be one dime of deficit, not one dime. So the bill that came out of the HELP Committee in the Senate—it is out of here. The bill that is coming out of the House of Representatives that has been through several committees—it cannot be considered under the President's own standard that it cannot increase the deficit one dime.

I am glad he is saying that. I am glad he is saying that because he is already proposing we increase our national debt by \$9 trillion over the next 10 years—doubling our national debt, tripling it over 10 years, spending more over the next 10 years, three times as much as we spent in World War II—amounts that have most people in this country alarmed about the debt of this government. So this should be a straightforward discussion about costs, reducing the cost of health care to you, if you are buying health care, and reducing the cost of health care to your government, which you are responsible for.

So the President has done us a favor. He said do not worry about the Senate bill that came out of the HELP Committee because—in effect, he said this—it adds to the deficit, so it has to go. For the bills coming out of the House of Representatives, the Congressional Budget Office has told us it adds to the deficit in the first 10 years, and it adds to the deficit even more in the next 10 years, so it has to go.

So now we have a new bill, and it is already a 250-page—I misspoke. It is not a bill yet. It is 250 pages of concepts. It is important for the American people to understand this. I think one of the things we have all heard, as much as anything, when we have gone home is: Did you read the bill? That is a pretty good question. It is a pretty big job because we have gotten in the habit around here of coming up with 1,000-page bills that Senators and Congressmen do not read. So the American people are saying to us: At least read the bill. They are saying to us, second: At least know what it costs. So that is a bare minimum of what we should insist on as we are going forward.

The bill introduced by the distinguished Senator who is the chairman of the Finance Committee is 250 pages of concepts. So everyone understands where we are in the process, the Finance Committee is meeting. They will be meeting all week. My guess is they will be meeting next week. They are trying to agree on what those concepts will finally be. The chairman has recommended what he thinks they ought to be, and now the committee is going to say what they think they should be.

Then, as I understand it, the Democratic leader is going to try to fit this bill that came out of the HELP Committee—that the President, in effect, has rejected because he says no deficit—well, it has a deficit—and he is going to try to put that bill that raises costs with the Baucus bill and turn it into one bill. The bill that came out of the HELP Committee is already nearly 1,000 pages. I do not know yet what will be coming out of the Finance Committee.

So in a week or two, we are going to be having another big bill we will have to read. Then the Congressional Budget Office, which is our official non-partisan outfit that tells us what things cost—appointed by the majority